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ABSTRACT

In this speech, the ingredients of an effective teacher appraisal system are discussed. The author identifies these ingredients as (1) staff involvement; (2) employment of a good management system; (3) setting clear school goals; (4) effective communication at all levels; and (5) sufficient commitment of time, money, and human understanding. (JF)

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TEACHER APPRAISAL: HOW TO MAKE IT MORE MEANINGFUL

In this age of accountability, this topic is most exciting and could be the most worthwhile one for discussion at this entire convention and it is one that must be discussed. Our job, as chief school administrators, is the education of all students and since, because of our position we are not able to do all the teaching ourselves, it, therefore, falls on us the major responsibility to insure that top-notch teaching is done.

Since we know that teachers are at various levels of development, ranging from an extremely motiviated and stimulating teacher to that of a dead beat of the worst order, our task then is to establish an appraisal system that is based on improving all staff members, systems, and processes. Dismissal is only a by-product of this process. Appraisal must be positive to be effective. However, we all know, at times, dismissal is about the only alternative left. If so, we must have the intestinal fortitude it takes to force one to improve or dismiss him, which means, in many cases, facing the pressures of unions, associations, pressure groups, and court hearings. But the end result, good education, is worth the effort.

The most important ingredient for meaningful appraisal of teaching is to believe it can be done, and the reason it isn't being done meaningfully is that we have too many so-called school administrators who fail to assume the accountability that the office entails. It is so easy to listen to staff members, fellow administrators and university professors who preach and teach negativism with such old cliches as, "Education cannot be measured," "Detailed objectives cannot be developed," "Personality is what is measured, not performance," "Everything is too interrelated to be measured," "Evaluation creates anxieties, insecurity, and morale problems," and all the rest of the tommyrot statements that seem to dull the conscience and quiet the parents and others who may be pushing us.

Briefly, some ingredients of an appraisal system are:

1) Involvement - Involve all your staff insofar as possible in setting up the system.

Together, get all the information you can from research, creativity of your staff, visiting topnotch schools, experimentation within your own system, and look at the facts.

There is an old saying, "If you want to catch big fleas, you run with big dogs." In other words, don't look at poorly-managed schools to find the answer.

Also, be creative in getting that staff involvement. Use more than planning task forces.

2) Management system - Set up good management at all levels. Employees expect, respect, and deserve good management. Good management requires appraisal at every level from the superintendent on down. Every employee must have a job description, know the standards generally expected of him, and each must have his own job expectancies or job targets agreed upon and written so both the teacher and supervisor know (in detail) what is wanted and what is being appraised.

Set up a system for individual counseling so everyone in the system has some person, either at his own level or close above. We, in our system, want someone at both levels who is close enough to the person to provide individual help and counseling.

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Inservice programs which give help to individuals, teams, and buildings must be an on-going part of good management appraisal. Recruitment, selection, and placement of staff must be well developed. Employment practices, transfers, and salary schedules must all reward excellence in teaching. Develop teams of appraisers around every individual in the school system.

3) Clear School Goals - Make sure that distant school goals and school priorities are established and known by the total staff. How can you expect to appraise your personnel if they do not know what is expected of them as an employee of the system.

4) Communications - Set yourself up to communicate, communicate, and communicate and when you are finished, start hearing and listening. Administrators must communicate with each other and with staff, giving all information that is at all helpful. Involve students, community and each other. Everyone must help each other to help hold all to a high level of accountability. One must have an open system where there is mutual respect and trust, where an individual's personnel file is always open to him, and there is no hidden information that some people feel is being withheld.

5) Commitment - Commit time, money and human understanding. The board, the superintendent, and the building principals are the key persons in this commitment, especially the line administrator in the commitment of human understanding. Finally, be sure that you monitor whatever system is set up and keep it open to change. I firmly believe that "the road to success is always under construction."

In Princeton we do not use one system for teacher appraisal; we use many. Each year in October, job expectancies are established by the teacher and the administrator. They are put in writing and are based on the previous experience of the teacher, objectives of the district and building, and the needs of the individual students for that year. Throughout the year, there are informal conferences between the principal and the teacher -- discussions about progress, possible new and different directions and ways of helping one another. The principal's role is one of providing help. At the end of the year, a formal conference is conducted and an evaluation made on the accomplishments of each job target. This is put in written form and the administrator also writes an evaluation of the staff member's performance, taking into consideration the job targets and other items of importance. This is discussed openly with the teacher so there is no fear that there is anything hidden. Both individuals sign the form. There is also the option for the individual teacher to appeal this appraisal.

We also provide a salary schedule that encourages professional growth. This includes merit pay, classification system, differentiated staffing, initiative unit system, added responsibility, and extended time. There is a difference of $4,000 between what our best and our below-average teacher can earn on our Master +12 years of experience step.

As we work with the teacher in how he is performing in his classroom, we use many evaluation techniques. These techniques are determined by the needs of the teacher. In some instances a check list may be used. In others, merely the informal discussions between principal and teacher after observation or during a problem period. For others, tape recorders and video taping are used. With some we have used Flanders Interaction Analysis. We have, this year, a number of teachers using the

Critical Incidents System that was established by the School Management Institute through the Battelle Research Institute, Columbus, Ohio. This procedure has identified 250 critical incidents in teaching under four headings: the teacher as an instructional leader, the teacher as a social leader, the teacher as a promoter of emotional development, and the teacher as communicator with parents and colleagues. This system involves having another teacher, principal, or supervisor (generally chosen by the teacher) to serve as a volunteer counselor. Teacher profiles are developed and high and low points identified. We have found, to date, this system to be extremely stimulating, but it is true that many of our staff members are not ready for it and it is one in which proper preparation and security must be present.

Most important in making appraisal meaningful is the fact that there must be great involvement, there must be detailed targets established, there must be standards established whereby these targets can be measured, and there must be flexibility in using various techniques with different teachers and it must be positive -- to improve education.

No one can tell me that teaching cannot be appraised for there are some things that are good and some that are not so good -- whether we are talking about presentation of subject matter, methodology, teacher relations with students, teacher relations with staff, parents and community; whether it has to do with management of equipment, materials, or people; or personal characteristics that make for strength and stability; or simply that of being creative, motivational, inspiring; or all the other things that go together to make the difference between having a school system that is alive, moving, and thrilling for people or one that is turning children off; thus, turning them out without an education.

Appraisal is a most challenging area and there may seem to be no one right answer, but any administrator who is not searching for that answer is not fulfilling his obligations.

Let me leave with food for thought:

Some administrators are like wheelbarrows;
no good unless pushed,
Some are like trailers;
they have to be pulled,
Some are like kites;
if you don't keep a string on them, they fly away,
Some are like balloons;
full of wind and ready to blow up,
Some are like footballs;
you can't tell which way they will bounce,
Some are like concrete;
dead weight
And then there are some who are like a good watch;
open face, pure gold, quietly busy and full of good works.

What kind of administrator are you?

Thank you.